

Thomas Hickman School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110313
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	310257
Inspection dates	25–26 September 2008
Reporting inspector	John Horwood

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	417
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	88
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Mary Baldwin
Headteacher	Mrs Carol Holman-Smith
Date of previous school inspection	23 May 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Belgrave Road Aylesbury HP19 9HP
Telephone number	01296 485 683
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average primary school. Although the majority of pupils are of White British heritage, an above average proportion have minority ethnic backgrounds. Most of these are from Pakistani or Caribbean backgrounds. Over one in four pupils do not have English as their first language. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is above the national average. An average percentage have learning difficulties, the majority of which are around communications and social or emotional issues. There are currently six 'looked after' children. The school has gained the bronze Eco-schools award. The school runs a breakfast club before school each day and there is an after school club run by a private provider off the school site. Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provision incorporates a Nursery and two Reception classes. The deputy headteacher only took up her post on 1 September 2008.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Thomas Hickman is a satisfactory and improving school where pupils thoroughly enjoy their learning. Under the determined leadership of the headteacher and her team, standards have improved because of improved teaching and the now good attitudes to learning and behaviour of the pupils. One parent typified parents' views saying, 'I think the school has improved immensely over the last few years. I think the teaching staff are a credit to the headteacher who is doing a wonderful job.'

Children in the EYFS make good progress in their personal, social and emotional development and this gives them a good start to their school life. Pupils achieve satisfactorily from very low starting points. At the end of Year 6, standards are still below average but there has been a steady improvement in standards in all subjects over the last four years. Pupils with learning difficulties are well supported in a caring environment and make similar progress to others. The school analyses the performance of all groups of pupils to ensure they make similar progress. There are some weaknesses in provision for the more able pupils, and they are not always challenged to make the better progress of which they are capable.

The school has identified significant variation in the quality of teaching across the school as well as variations in how well teachers use assessment data to give effective guidance on how to improve. Good improvements in both these areas have been made. There is now reliable data on pupils' progress for the last two years, and the consistency of teaching is improving. Teaching is now satisfactory, and all the lessons seen during the inspection were satisfactory or better. Planning is thorough with a strong emphasis on basic skills. Pupils say they are given targets and helped to achieve them. In some lessons pupils do not all make as much progress as they should because the work is not sufficiently challenging, especially for more able pupils. The very good relationships between adults and pupils contribute greatly to the learning environment. Staff use praise and rewards well to motivate pupils and encourage improvement. This is reflected by the improved attendance rates, which are now similar to national averages.

The curriculum covers all the basics well and is enhanced by a good range of extras such as clubs and visits. Pupils' participation in sport and their eating of fruit demonstrates their understanding of healthy lifestyles. They confidently express their views through the school council and enthusiastically join the 'eco squad' as part of a good contribution to the community. Movement around the school and pupils' behaviour in lessons demonstrate they understand safe practices. Their improving standards mean they are satisfactorily prepared for the next stage of their education.

Leaders and managers have a very good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. However, subject leaders do not play a big enough part in ensuring consistent teaching across the school. The success in ensuring pupils make good progress in their personal development whilst standards continue to rise shows that the school is well placed to improve.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children enter the Nursery with skills and capabilities well below those expected for their age, particularly in language and communication skills. In both Nursery and Reception, they make at least satisfactory progress across all the areas of learning. At the end of Reception, standards are still well below expectations in all areas except in personal, social and emotional development

where there has been good progress. As a result, children work and play well together and make good progress in developing their self-confidence. Progress in the past has been hampered by unreliable assessment systems, and weak use of the data available. Teaching is now satisfactory and improving, as staff make better use of new, more reliable assessments. The curriculum contains an appropriate balance of teacher-led and child-initiated activities. The designated outside play area provides the children with the full range of relevant practical and creative activities. Adults are sensitive to children's needs and provide good support for their personal development in many ways. They work well together as a team and with parents, providing a smooth start to the children's school life and good transition to Year 1.

What the school should do to improve further

- Eliminate the inconsistencies in teaching and academic guidance in order to improve progress in every class.
- Ensure that all pupils, especially the more able, are sufficiently challenged in all lessons so that they achieve as well as they can.
- Ensure consistent leadership and management, at all levels, across the whole school particularly through involving subject leaders more in driving improvements.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards at the end of Year 2 are well below average. They have shown a steady, gradual increase since 2002 but with some year groups being above or below the expected trend levels. The school identifies this as being due to inconsistencies in the teachers' assessments, which have now been addressed. Standards at the end of Year 6 are below average but have shown a continuous improvement in recent years in all subjects. In 2007, English showed a sharp rise in standards but this fell back in 2008 to be in line with the increase seen in other subjects. In 2007, Year 6 was a small cohort whose class teachers were English specialists. Achievement overall is satisfactory in the school with pupils of all abilities and backgrounds making similar progress from their very low starting points. This progress has not been the same in all classes due to variations in the teaching. It is now more consistent as a result of staff changes and the professional development of teachers. Progress is now satisfactory in all lessons and good in the majority.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Several parents were quick to praise the school's commitment to improvement and supporting every child by, as one parent noted, providing a very well rounded education, balancing academic work with creativity. Pupils are friendly, behave well and have positive attitudes towards the school, where they feel safe and well cared for. The school has worked hard to improve attendance which is now average, an improvement since the previous inspection. The pupils appreciate the wide range of opportunities they have to take part in physical exercise, and they are gaining a good understanding of how to lead healthy lifestyles, for example by growing vegetables in the school garden and learning how to cook them. Pupils contribute well to the school and surrounding community. They voice their opinions confidently and participate

enthusiastically in the school council. They are proud of their influence in improving the school's environment, through the ECO Squad. In the community, pupils participate in a range of activities and raise funds to support those less fortunate than themselves. Given their satisfactory achievement, supported by good personal development, the way that they are prepared for later life is satisfactory overall. Pupils who attend the breakfast club behave well and join in the activities provided for them. They make good progress in their development of social skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teachers have good relationships with pupils and manage their classes well through consistent expectations of behaviour. As a result, pupils have good attitudes to learning and behave well. Teachers generally plan well to meet the needs of all pupils and are well supported by a skilled team of teaching assistants. A strength of the teaching is the ongoing review of planning, reflecting progress made in lessons. The quality of teaching is not yet consistent across the school and pupils' progress is satisfactory over time. Good and better lessons are characterised by an effective range of strategies for teaching which leads to a good pace of learning. In some lessons pupils do not all make as much progress as they should because the work is not sufficiently challenging, especially for more able pupils. There are good models of practice within the school that are not yet shared across the school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum matches the needs of most pupils. Pupils with specific needs and learning difficulties are well supported and benefit from working in small groups. However, the needs of the more able pupils are not fully met as they are not always given tasks that allow them to think creatively and develop their ideas. The school's identification of and support for gifted and talented pupils is at an early stage of development. The school is clear that the matching of the curriculum to pupils' needs is not consistent across all subjects. In English, for example, teachers are more able to respond to pupils' needs than in other subjects such as mathematics, where they are more likely to be simply covering curriculum themes and topics. The curriculum encourages and contributes well to learners' personal development and their attitudes. Pupils speak eloquently of their regard for each other's cultural and religious beliefs. Pupils praise the range of enrichment activities, which contribute well to their enjoyment and achievement. Older pupils say that the curriculum has improved over the last few years and that they feel more involved in their school because teachers are listening to their views and responding well.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

'I always feel that my children come first with the school.' commented one parent, typifying the views of many. All pupils are cared for well and this includes those who attend the well-managed breakfast club. Pastoral care and support focuses effectively on the needs of the individual and the school works very closely with a range of outside agencies to achieve this. There are good procedures in place for child protection and health and safety. Good support is provided for vulnerable pupils including those with a range of learning difficulties to enable them to feel secure and make the same progress as others. Targets for improvement

are set for literacy and numeracy that encompass, 'must', 'should', 'could', and 'could even' which children understand and use. In effective lessons, children are informed whether they have achieved their targets and what they need to do to improve. Teaching assistants contribute effectively to individual pupils' understanding of tasks. They keep records of progress and annotate guidance sheets developed by teachers. Pupils say they are well supported by adults in the school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Members of the senior management team have done much to build confidence among staff, pupils and parents. They are clearly focussing on raising standards by improving the quality of teaching through making all teachers responsible for progress in their lessons. They are enabling teachers to do this through training and are monitoring it rigorously through progress review meetings. Self-evaluation is good and leads to an accurate picture of strengths and weaknesses. Staff and governors share a commitment to raising standards whilst providing equal opportunities to all pupils. Their actions have led to improvements in standards and the quality of teaching, although more needs to be done to ensure all pupils benefit from the same improved quality of teaching. Subject leaders are not sufficiently involved in monitoring lessons and their expertise is not sufficiently shared with colleagues. The school plans to develop this now that the new deputy is in place. The school's record shows that it is well placed to improve further.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	3
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	3
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	3
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3

¹Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

09 October 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Thomas Hickman School, Aylesbury, HP19 9HP

Thank you for welcoming us to your school. We enjoyed talking to you, looking at your work and seeing how much your school is improving. We were impressed by your behaviour and how polite and courteous you were to visitors. It is good that you realise the school is improving and that you could tell us about these improvements, both in how much more you are now involved and in how much better you are learning. The eco-squad looked really dedicated and hard working in their boots and it was good to see you all sharing their achievement in assembly.

Your school is improving and is providing you with a satisfactory education. You are all achieving satisfactorily and the standard of your work is improving. These are some of the good things about your school.

- The staff care about you and look after you well.
- You behave well and have developed good social skills.
- Your headteacher, the staff and the governors have worked hard to improve your school.
- The school has worked hard with your families and with the local community to increase your opportunities for learning.
- Teaching and learning are improving to enable you to make even better progress.

You can help the teachers by always working hard and asking them to help you when you need it. We have asked the headteacher to make sure that you all benefit from good lessons and that subject leaders get more involved in looking at your lessons to see how they can improve. We have asked her to ensure that all teachers are accurately assessing your progress and giving you good quality advice on how to improve. We have also asked that teachers ensure that they set you work that is sufficiently challenging so that all of you, including the more able, can make as much progress as you can.

We hope that you will continue to enjoy school and we wish you all every success in your education.

Yours sincerely

John Horwood

Lead Inspector